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INFO RUMTBK/AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
RUHHHQA/CINCPAC POLAD
RUMJFS/AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE
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S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 SAIGON

LIMDIS

SUBJ: TRAN VAN HUONG ON THE POLITICAL SITUATION

REF: A) SAIGON 703, B) SAIGON 1244

1. EMBOFF HAD HOUR AND A QUARTER CONVERSATION WITH TRAN VAN HUONG MORNING JULY 22. HUONG MADE THE FOLLOWING POINTS ON THE CURRENT POLITICAL SITUATION:

A. HUONG IS NOT PLANNING TO WITHDRAW FROM THE PRESIDENTIAL RACE. HE WAS SUSPICIONS ABOUT THE INTENTIONS OF THIEU AND KY, BUT THERE IS NO PROOF THAT THEY WILL TRY TO RIG THE ELECTIONS. THERE MUST BE CONCRETE EVIDENCE, SUCH AS OBVIOUS POLICE PRESSURE, TO CAUSE HIM TO RECONSIDER HIS DECISION TO RUN FOR PRESI-

DENT. AT THE MOMENT HE HAS NO SUCH EVIDENCE. IF AT SOME POINT IN THE FUTURE HE FEELS OBLIGED TO WITHDRAW HE WILL INFORM EMBOFF, "AT LEAST THREE DAYS IN ADVANCE".

B. HUONG ASKED EMBOFF'S IMPRESSION OF THE EVENTS OF JULY 17 AND 18. WHEN EMBOFF CONFESSED THAT HE WAS PUZZLED BY THE CONTRADICTORY REPORTS OF WHAT HAD TAKEN PLACE BEHIND THE SCENES, HUONG SAID THAT HE IS CERTAIN LE PHUOC SANG VOTED AGAINST THE THIEU-KY SLATE IN THE ASSEMBLY'S SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON JULY 17. ASKED WHY SANG WOULD DO THIS, HUONG SAID THAT THE MOVE WAS INTENDED TO "GIVE THIEU A KICK IN THE SHIN". HUONG EXPLAINED THAT HE HAD INSTRUCTED THE HRS DEPUTIES TO VOTE FOR THE THIEU-KY TICKET AND AGAINST BOTH THE BIG MINH AND AU TRUONG

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THANH SLATES. THERE IS NOTHING ILLEGAL IN THIEU AND KY STAYING ON IN THEIR GOVERNMENT POSITIONS. ON THE OTHER HAND, IT IS CLEAR THAT BIG MINH'S RUNNING MATE DID INDEED HAVE FRENCH CITIZENSHIP. AS FOR THANH, HUONG HAS LONG HAD DARK SUSPICIONS ABOUT THE MAN, AND IT IS NOW QUITE CLEAR THAT THANH IS PLAYING THE COMMUNIST GAME.

C. HUONG WENT ON TO SAY THAT THERE HAD BEEN A VERY DANGEROUS SITUATION ON JULY 18, WITH A REAL POSSIBILITY OF

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POLICE ACTION AGAINST THE ASSEMBLY. HE HIMSELF WAS WARNED ABOUT SLEEPING IN HIS APARTMENT THAT NIGHT, BUT HE HAS LIVED TOO LONG TO BE FRIGHTENED BY SUCH THREATS AND HE WENT TO BED AT HOME AS USUAL. NEVERTHELESS THE POLICE WERE ON THE ALERT AND THE SITUATION MIGHT HAVE TURNED OUT VERY BADLY.

D. ALTHOUGH THERE ARE NO LEGAL REASONS WHY THIEU-KY SHOULD STEP DOWN DURING THE CAMPAIGN PERIOD, THERE ARE GOOD POLITICAL REASONS FOR SUCH AN ACTION. "IF THE JUDGE HAS AN INTEREST IN THE CASE, WHERE IS JUSTICE?" THE IMPORTANT THING IS THAT THE PEOPLE WILL HAVE NO CONFIDENCE IN THE ELECTION IF IT IS RUN BY THIEU AND KY, EVEN IF IN FACT THEY DO EVERYTHING PROPERLY. THE LIFTING OF PRESS CENSORSHIP IS VERY GOOD, BUT IT IS NOT ENOUGH. TO GET THE FULL POLITICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL BENEFIT FROM THIS ELECTION, THIEU AND KY SHOULD LEAVE THEIR GOVERNMENT POSITIONS. YOUTH AND STUDENT GROUPS ARE UNHAPPY BECAUSE THIEU AND KY APPARENTLY WILL NOT TAKE THIS ACTION.

E. EMBOFF ASKED HUONG IF HE ANTICIPATES THAT BIG MINH WILL NOW SUPPORT HIM FOR PRESIDENT. HUONG SAID THAT THIS IS NOT CERTAIN BECAUSE HIS ENEMIES ARE TRYING TO PERSUADE BIG MINH THAT HE WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE REJECTION OF THE MINH

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SLATE. AU TRUONG THANH HAS TOLD MRS. MINH THAT HUONG WAS BEHIND THE ASSEMBLY DECISION AGAINST MINH, AND HE HAD TO GO HIMSELF TO SEE MRS. MINH ABOUT THIS. IN FACT, SIAD HUONG HE WOULD NEVER CRITIZE OR HURT EITHER MINH OR PHAN KHAC SUU, BOTH OF WHOM WERE HIS FRIENDS ONCE.

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F. HUONG OBSERVED THAT AU TRUONG THANH IS NOW DOING ALL HE CAN TO DEFEAT HUONG. THANH AND OTHERS WHO OPPOSE HUONG SAY THAT HE IS OLD AND SICK, THAT HE PLANS TO NEGOTIATE WITH THE NLF IF HE IS ELECTED, AND THAT HE IS A REGIONALIST WHO WOULD CAUSE DIVISIONS AMONG NORTHERNERS AND SOUTHERNERS. IN FACT THESE CHARGES ARE ALL FALSE, BUT MANY OF THEM HAVE GOT INTO THE FOREIGN PRESS, THANKS TO THANH AND HUONG'S OTHER OPPONENTS. HIS HEALTH IS GOOD, HE WOULD NEVER NEGOTIATE WITH THE NLF, AND MORE THAN HALF OF HIS TOP CAMPAGN AIDES ARE NORTHERNERS. (HUONG REPEATED THIS SEVERAL TIMES, PUTTING PARTICULAR EMPHASIS ON THE IDEA THAT HE WOULD NOT DIGNIFY THE NLF AND GIVE IT "EQUAL STATUS WITH THE GOVERNMENT OF VIETNAM" BY CONSENTING TO NEGOTIATE WITH IT. AS IN EARLIER CONVERSATION REPORTED REFERENCE A, HUONG EXPLAINED THAT THANH TURNED AGAINST HIM AFTER HE REFUSED TO AGREE TO MAKE THANH HIS PRIME MINISTER IF

HE WERE ELECTED.) HUONG OBSERVED WITH A LAUGH THAT THERE IS NOW ONLY ONE MORE THING THAT THANH CAN DO AGAINST HIM - THANH CAN NOW LET IT BE KNOWN PUBLICLY THAT HE SUPPORTS HUONG.

G. HUONG STRESSED THAT HIS CAMPAIGN WORKERS ARE ALL UNPAID. HE SAID THAT HE WAS NO MEANS TO FINANCE A VIGOROUS NATIONWIDE CAMPAIGN, AND HIS WORKERS ARE SUPPORTING HIM SIMPLY OUT OF AFFECTION FOR HIM. MANY ARE HIS FORMER STUDENTS. BUNKER
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Saigon 1681

S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 SAIGON 1681
LIMDIS

H. THE TROUBLE WITH VIETNAM TODAY IS THAT THE SOCIETY IS ROTTEN. CORRUPTION HAS GREATLY WEAKENED THE VIETNAMESE ABILITY TO RESIST COMMUNISM. CORRUPTION COMES FROM THE TOP AND THE PEOPLE KNOW IT. THERE IS NOW A CRISIS OF CONFIDENCE AND A CRISIS OF AUTHORITY. THE PEOPLE BELIEVE NOTHING WHICH THE AUTHORITIES SAY. IN THE GOVERNMENT, THERE IS NO RESPECT FOR THE LAW AND NO ONE FEARS ANYONE ELSE. THOSE IN POWER DO JUST AS THEY LIKE AND NO ONE REALLY CONTROLS THE GOVERNMENT. WHEN DIEM CAME TO POWER, THE PEOPLE BELIEVED IN HIM AND FOR A LONG TIME HE WAS SUCCESSFUL BECAUSE HE HAD THE CONFIDENCE OF THE PEOPLE. EVEN THOUGH THE ARMY

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AND THE RELIGIOUS SECTS OPPOSED HIM, HE CONTINUED IN POWER, AND THE REASON WAS THAT THE PEOPLE BELIEVED IN HIM AS AN INCORRUPTIBLE NATIONALIST. THE VIETNAMESE PEOPLE ARE AN EMOTIONAL PEOPLE WITH A LOW LEVEL OF POLITICAL MATURITY. THEY PAY NO ATTENTION TO PLANS AND SPEECHES. THEY ARE ILLOGICAL IN THEIR POLITICAL RESPONSES. THUS THEY WILL FOLLOW THE LEADERS WHOM THEY INSTINCTIVELY TRUST, AND THEY WILL BE CTMPLETELY UNMOVED BY THE APPEALS, NO MATTER HOW SKILLFUL, OF THOSE WHOM THEY HAVE LEARNED TO DISTRUST.

I. ASKED IF HE HAD READ THE AMBASSADOR'S SPEECH OF JULY 15 TO THE VIETNAMESE JOURNALISTS ASSOCIATION, HUONG SAID THAT HE THOUGH IT A VERY GOOD SPEECH. HE COMMENTED THAT HE KNOWS THE US FAVORS CLEAN ELECTIONS, AND HE WAS NOT SURPRISED BY THE AMBASSADOR'S SPEECH. THERE ARE ELEMENTS WHO TRY TO BLACKEN THE AMERICANS HERE, HOWEVER. IN MANY CASES, THEY ARE INSPIRED BY THE VIET CONG. HE HAS HEARD, FOR EXAMPLE, OF FOUR MEN IN BIEN HOA WHO HAVE CAME SHOWING THAT

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THEY WORK FOR THE CIA; THESE MEN ARE SUPPORTERS OF HA THUC KY, AND THEY ARE SAYING THAT THE CIA BACKS HA THUC KY. EMBOFF ASSURED HUONG THAT THIS IS NOT TRUE.

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2. HUONG SEEMED TIRED, AND HE SAID THAT HE MUST MEET A CONSTANT STREAM OF VISITORS WHO COME TO HIM UNTIL LATE AT NIGHT. ALTHOUGH HE SAID THAT HIS YOUTHFUL SUPPORTERS MOUNT A CONSTANT GUARD OVER HIM LEST HE BE ASSASSINATED, EMBOFF SAW NO EVIDENCE OF SUCH A GUARD.

3. COMMENT: A) THERE SEEMS TO BE LITTLE DANGER AT THIS POINT THAT HUONG WILL WITHDRAW FROM THE PRESIDENTIAL RACE. HE CLEARLY DOES NOT FEEL THAT THIEU AND KY ARE CURRENTLY USING UNFAIR TACTICS IN THE CAMPAIGN, THOUGH HE REMAINS VERY SUSPICIOUS. LIFTING OF PRESS CENSORSHIP PROBABLY REASSURED HIM.

B) HUONG'S COMMENTS ABOUT CAMPAIGN FUNDS ECHO REMARKS BY VO LO G TRIEU REPORTED REFERENCE B. MONEY IS PROBABLY ONE OF HUONG'S MAJOR PROBLEMS.

C) HUONG'S ACCOUNT OF THE EVENTS OF JULY 17 AND 18 IS ESSENTIALLY THE SAME AS THAT OF VO LONG TRIEU AND PROBABLY COMES FROM THE SAME SOURCES - THE MRS DEPUTIES. HUONG'S ACCOUNT MAY BE TRUE, BUT IT IS NOT CLEAR TO US THAT LE PHUOC SANG DID IN FACT VOTE AGAINST THE THIEU-KY TICKET, OR THAT THE MOTIVE WAS "TO GIVE THIEU A KICK IN THE SHIN".

D) WE HAVE INDICATIONS FROM YOUTH LEADERS THAT THEY MAY UNDERTAKE SOME "MANIFESTATION" OF THEIR DISSATISFACTION WITH THE CONTINUED PRESSENCE OF THIEU AND KY IN THEIR GOVERNMENT POSITIONS DURING THE CAMPAIGN. HUONG'S SUPPORTERS ARE PROBABLY ENCOURAGING THIS SORT OF THING. HUONG HIMSELF PROBABLY DOES NOT EXPECT SUCH PRESSURES TO RESULT IN THIEU-KY STEPPING DOWN, THOUGH HIS REMARKS COULD BE CONSTRUED AS AN EFFORT TO GET THE US TO PUT PRESSURE ON THIEU AND KY TO TAKE LEAVE FROM THEIR GOVERNMENT POSITIONS. HE PROBABLY SEES THIS MATTER PRIMARILY AS A USEFUL CAMPAIGN ISSUE AGAINST THIEU-KY, AND HE WILL LIKELY TRY TO KEEP THE ISSUE ALIVE. BUNKER

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